

Cultural and Natural Overview of Elden Pueblo

(Pasiwvi – “The Place of Coming Together”)

Elden Pueblo, or, *Pasiwvi* (Pah-see-oo-vi) is a 60 to 70 room pueblo recognized by the Hopi people as an ancestral village occupied from around A.D. 1080 to about A.D. 1275. Archaeologists refer to these residents as the Sinagua, a term that is based on an early Spanish name for the San Francisco Peaks, the “*Sierra Sin Agua*”, or, “Mountains Without Water”.



The Hopi name for the Peaks is *Nuva'tukya'ovi*, or, “Place of snow on the very top”. Hopi refer to their ancestors as *Hisat'sinom*, - *The Ancient People*”, and *Pasiwvi* (Elden Pueblo) was the “place of coming together” or “place where decisions were made”. The site was named “Elden Pueblo” in 1926 by Dr. Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution, and was based on the site’s proximity to Mt. Elden in the foothills of the San Francisco Peaks.

The Environment

Pasiwvi is located in an open ponderosa pine forest, interspersed with patches of cliff rose and Gambel oak. Mt. Elden, a prominent dacite laccolith dome, dominates the horizon a half mile to the west. Over the millennia, erosion from its slopes has washed rocks and boulders into the area. These rocks provided the building stones for the pueblo, and a golden-colored clay, found in the washes that come off the mountain, furnished mortar and plaster for the structure.

At the base of Mt. Elden is an exposure of Moenkopi sandstone that was used for some of the manos, metates, grinding slabs and grinding stones found at the site, almost like today’s sandpaper. Basalt, for other grinding tools and building materials, probably came from volcanic cinder cones to the northeast, or, from Sheep Hill, a cinder cone only a quarter mile to the southeast.



Oak Spring, which is located on the slopes of Mt. Elden, was the closest permanent water source, although other springs that may have been used include Sandy Seep, 1 mi. north near the Robinson Hills; Elden Spring, 1.5 mi. southwest; and Little Elden Springs, 2.5 mi. to the northwest, a major water source for the area.

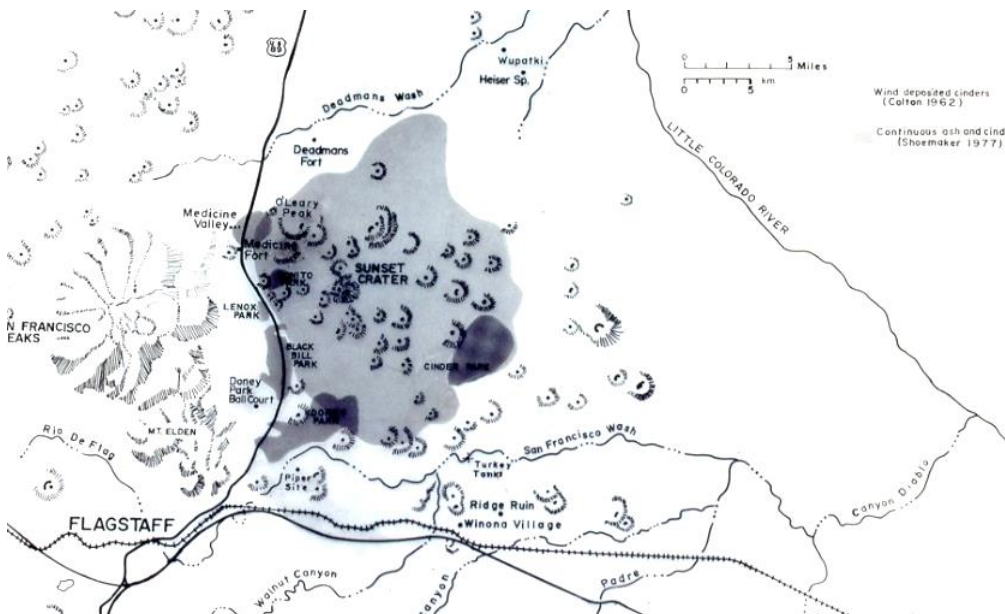
Pasiwvi sits on the fringe of two biological life zones. The rain shadow created by Mt. Elden creates a milder climate than the surrounding pine forest and is more typical of the pinyon-juniper zone several miles to the east. The location of *Pasiwvi* was unique because, from one spot, the Sinagua could exploit resources from two life zones.

The open forest landscape, sloping down to large alluvial parks 0.5 mi. to the northeast and southeast, supported an abundance of wildlife including deer, antelope, mountain sheep, bear, coyote, squirrel, gopher, rabbit and wild turkey. Agriculture was possible along some of the washes and there is evidence of stone check dams across the washes that would have effectively slowed and retained rainwater flow in the nearby farming plots.

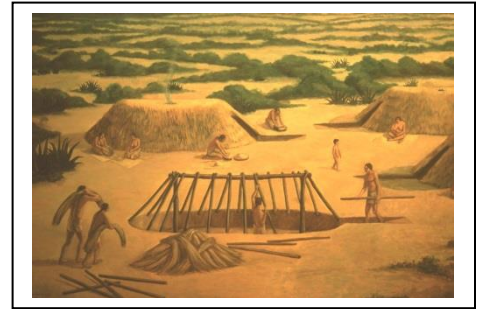
People on the Landscape

Indigenous people lived seasonally in the vicinity of the San Francisco Peaks for at least 11,000 years, sharing ideas, new technologies and beliefs. They followed herds of animals and the ripening of plants collected for food and medicine. Traditional healers in the group would have known which plants were safe to use and which should be avoided, based on information passed down through generations. Some people stayed all year long, but others may have relocated to lower elevations during snowy winter months.

Changes in the Flagstaff area would come in response to an event that was remembered and retold in Native stories passed through the generations. In the latter part of the 11th century the eruptions of Sunset Crater, 10 mi. northeast of *Pasiwvi* displaced people, most of whom moved to lower elevations, encouraged by a climate change to moister conditions. Areas such as Homol'ovi near Winslow and the Verde Valley also experienced population increases at that time.



Area covered by volcanic ash and cinders from the eruption of Sunset Crater



At *Pasiwvi*, in the ponderosa pines, a few families constructed pit house villages in the shadow of the San Francisco Peaks. A pit house is much more than a hole in the ground – it would have been warm in winter, cool in summer, and people were outdoors for most of their day, cooking for large groups and sharing the bounty. Agriculture became a primary source for food, especially dry-adapted maize (corn) which can be dried for leaner times. Today, even with grocery stores, traditional Hopi farmers still try to have at least a four-year's supply of corn to protect against calamities that impact the food supply.

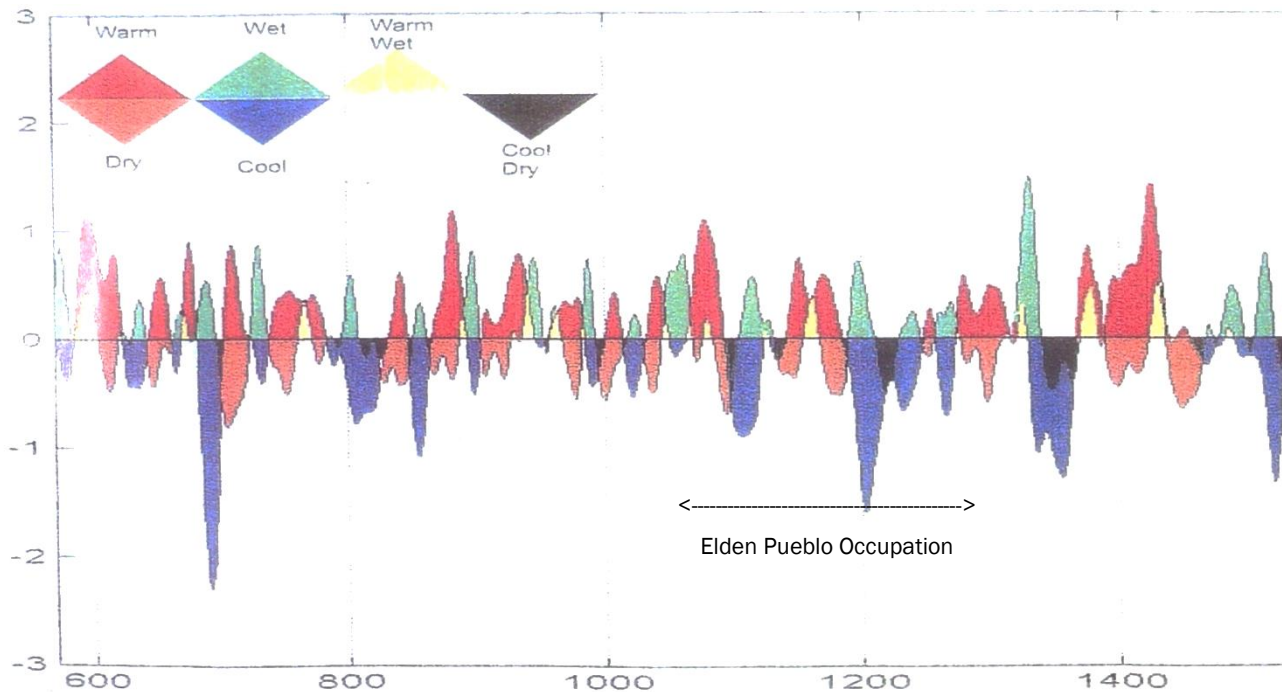
Adaptation

As people became more reliant on agriculture, they began shifting to pueblos as their permanent residence, allowing families to settle in one place, watch the fields and not constantly move with the seasons. Pueblos are above-ground masonry dwellings, usually built of stone, and one room would generally house a family of four or five people. When visitors ask how many people lived in a community, archaeologists estimate the number of rooms at a certain period of time and multiply that number by three or four people. But at best, it is just an estimate since the number of people in each family was probably in constant change.

Another innovation that changed life was the adoption of ceramic vessels for food and water storage, and cooking. When food and water can be stockpiled people are reassured there will be plenty for the community in leaner times. The ability to cook a nutritious stew with protein and plants, that can be shared, improves nutrition. This becomes even more important as people ask to join an established community, potentially straining food resources in the area.

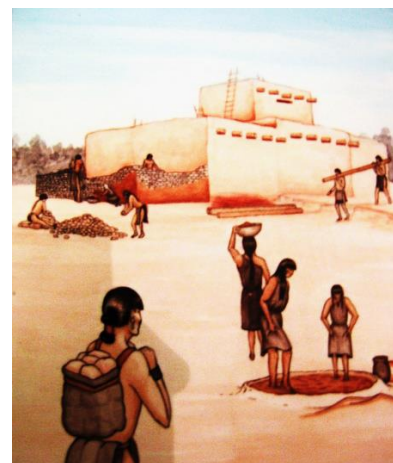
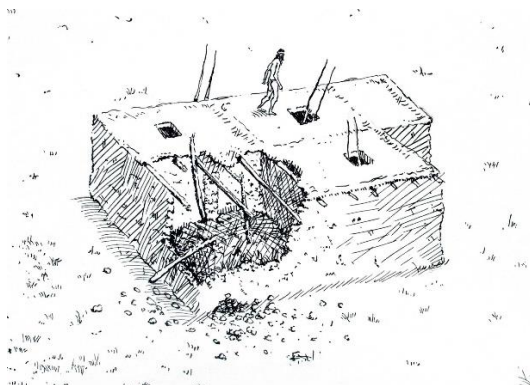
People who live in Puebloan cultures, then and now, are also linked by generations of family connections, cultural beliefs and strong values. So, a "Pueblo" represents a type of architecture and a community. But it also means a shared culture, value system and lifeway for these related people across the Southwest. If families had to move because they could no longer support themselves, they could join relatives in other expanding communities. These populations bonded even more as people joined with other Native groups in the Southwest and became associated through the generations. The old interpretation that Pueblo people just disappeared from northern Arizona is inaccurate – they just relocated and are still with us today.

The communal lifestyle of a pueblo allowed the inhabitants to cooperatively watch over children, farm plots, extended family members and all aspects of life that benefit from everyone working together for a common goal. As families expanded through time, and new groups joined the community, more rooms were added to the existing pueblo, sometimes as a second or even third story.



Prehistoric moisture and temperature conditions, A.D. 600-1500. "0" is an assumed baseline for comparative purposes.

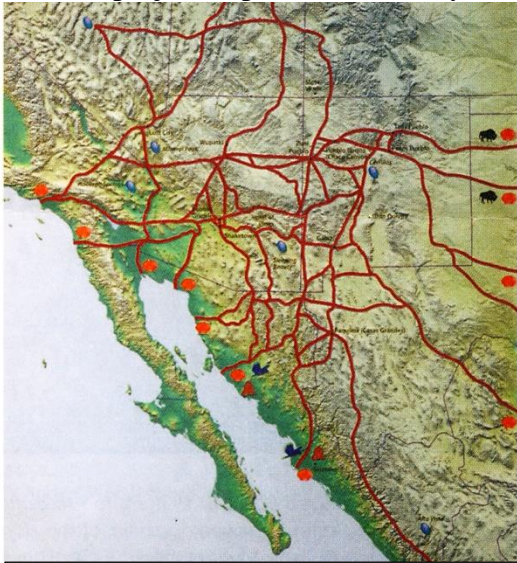
Around A.D. 1100, the climate in northern Arizona again gradually transitioned to wetter, cooler time, and most people relocated to lower elevations in the pinyon-juniper zone where farming conditions were optimal. Still, some families remained at *Pasiwvi* and constructed more durable stone-lined pit houses as well as above-ground masonry pueblos of two to three rooms. They became the nucleus around which *Pasiwvi* would



grow, suggesting that three or four families formed the social foundation on which *Pasiwvi* was established. They ultimately grew into a community that occupied a two-story high complex of about 65 rooms, the largest pueblo in the Flagstaff area.

By A.D. 1150, *Pasiwvi* became an important trade center where ideas, as well as goods, were exchanged. Skilled artisans lived at the site, making plainware pottery, beautifully crafted axes and ground stone tools,

obsidian projectile points, and finely woven cotton textiles.



Prehistoric Southwest trade routes



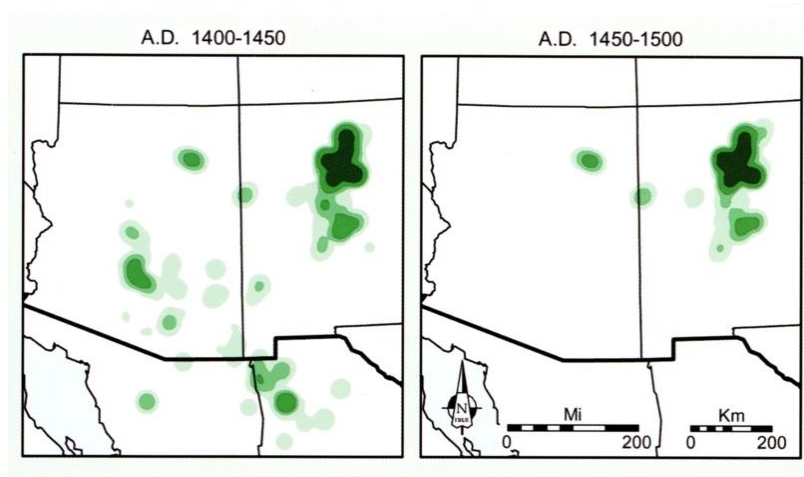
Trade connections extended across the Southwest, bringing shell jewelry from the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean, turquoise, argillite, mineral pigments, and even scarlet macaws and copper bells from Mesoamerica. Sinagua seldom made decorated pottery, but obtained it from Pueblo people of the Kayenta and Winslow regions to the north and east. Sinagua plainware pottery demonstrated originality in form and appearance, with bowls featuring a brilliant red exterior and a highly polished black, smudged interior.



Rare artifacts, such as decorative nose plugs, carved bone hair pins, bird effigy vessels, and turquoise mosaics in the shapes of frogs and birds in flight suggest to some archaeologists that Sinagua had a hierarchical social structure, a clan system, and religious, medicinal, and war societies to serve the community. Only special people might have worn these objects as symbols of rank and status within the community.

Around A.D. 1250, during another period of drought, more families began moving into *Pasiwvi*, almost doubling the population. An enclosed courtyard and the large community room were built during this time. But

continued dry conditions and a shorter growing season caused by cooler temperatures resulted in a gradual movement away from the pueblo by A.D. 1275. People gathered their belongings, may have burned their rooms for closure, and moved to areas north, south and east where related families and other groups were already coming together to form large pueblo communities of over 100 rooms.



By A.D. 1400, many people joined the emerging Hopi and Zuni cultures to the north and east. But *Pasiwvi* and other ancestral communities in the Flagstaff area were never forgotten. The sites were remembered through oral traditions and annual pilgrimages which are still conducted today to honor their ancestors.

Historic Period

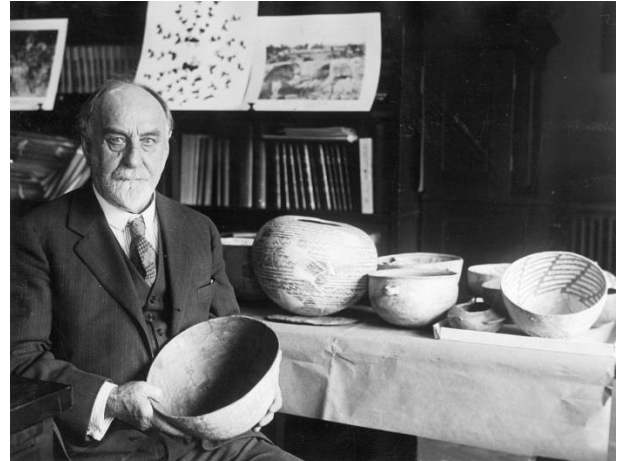


VIEW OF PART OF PUEBLO 142



John Elden

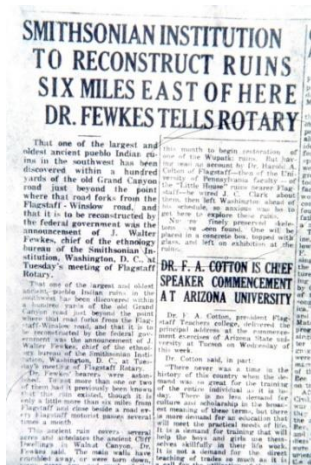
Euro-Americans began arriving in the 1870s, including John Elden, a shepherd for whom Mt. Elden is named. In 1916, Dr. Harold S. Colton and his wife, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, founders of the Museum of Northern Arizona, began an archaeological survey of the Flagstaff area. Mrs. Colton rediscovered *Pasiwvi* on Oct. 23, 1916 while horseback riding.



A draft report of sites around Flagstaff by Dr. Colton likely influenced Dr. Jesse Walter Fewkes and John P. Harrington of the Smithsonian Institution to excavate the site to better understand Hopi traditions about the Flagstaff area. In 1926 the scientists unearthed 35 rooms and 2,500 artifacts that went to the Smithsonian, many of which have since been repatriated to the Hopi and Zuni, descendants of the ancient Sinagua.



Dr. Fewkes believed in sharing the results of archaeological work with the public and he gave many tours and lectures to the community, naming the site “Elden Pueblo” after Mt. Elden. Philip Zeyouma, a Hopi from the village of Mishongnovi, on Second Mesa, opened a trading post at the site from about 1927 to 1933 when the Depression era forced most tourism-based businesses in the Southwest to close.



Dr. Fewkes's plans to designate the site as a National Monument never materialized. Nevertheless, he laid the groundwork for public participation and education at Elden Pueblo that continues today. In 1978, the U.S. Forest Service was considering the area around Elden Pueblo for a land exchange, but when testing found much of the pueblo was intact, determined it should be preserved as a cultural heritage site instead.



In 1980, it was decided to interpret Elden Pueblo through public archaeology where visitors, particularly students, could gain an understanding of archaeology and Hopi traditions while developing a sense of conservation and stewardship for cultural, historical, and natural resources on public lands.

Today, project partners include the Coconino National Forest, the Arizona Natural History Association, the Museum of Northern Arizona and the Arizona Archaeological Society, supported by grants from the City of Flagstaff Arts Council and the Flagstaff Community Foundation. Participants continue to learn about the science of archaeological concepts, values, laws and practices.



Pasiwvi was never forgotten and was only “rediscovered” by Euro-American newcomers to Flagstaff. Descendants of the Sinagua continue to educate and share traditional knowledge, stories and significance about their ancestors and this important place. Today, Elden Pueblo hosts an award-winning archaeology program that educates thousands of school children and visitors each year about the lives of the earlier people who once inhabited the land of the *Sierra Sin Agua* and *Pasiwvi – The place of coming together*.

Places to visit for more information

The Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff has the area's most comprehensive information on display in its award-winning "Native People of the Colorado Plateau" exhibit. Sharlot Hall Museum and the Museum of Indigenous People, both located in Prescott, AZ., have updated information, as does Homol'ovi State Park near Winslow, AZ.

The Sinagua are also highlighted at the Flagstaff Area National Monuments visitor centers at Walnut Canyon, Sunset Crater and Wupatki. The Hopi Cultural Center and Museum on Second Mesa, AZ. introduces visitors to their culture and history: www.hopiculturalcenter.com.

All facilities have been impacted by Covid-19 closures; call first to verify opening hours.

Recommended Reading

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Kamp, Kathryn

1998 *Life in the Pueblo: Understanding the Past Through Archaeology*. Waveland Press, Inc., Prospect Park.

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1987 "Hisatsinom: The Ancient People of Sunset Crater". In: *Earth Fire: A Hopi Legend of the Sunset Crater Eruption*, by Ekkehart Malotki and Michael Lomatuway'ma, Northland Press, Flagstaff.

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- 2009 Elden Pueblo: Historic Excavations to Contemporary Public Archaeology. *In: Archaeology In America: An Encyclopedia*, Volume 3, *Southwest and Great Basin/Plateau*, edited by Francis P. McManamon, Linda S. Cordell, Kent G. Lightfoot, and George R. Milner, Greenwood Press, Westport.

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- 1987 *A Guide to Sunset Crater and Wupatki*. Western National Parks Association, Tucson, AZ.

Thybony, Scott.

- 2006 *Walnut Canyon National Monument*. Western National Parks Association.

Images courtesy of: Peter J. Pilles, Jr., Coconino National Forest; artists Brian Donahue and Marvin Marcroft; The Center for Desert Archaeology; *Archaeology Southwest* magazine; the Arizona State Museum, Tucson; the National Park Service; the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, Albuquerque, N.M.; the Arizona Historical Society; and the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Historia, Mexico City.